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SUBJECT: TWO NEW POLITICAL PARTIES IN GHANA

¶1. (SBU) SUMMARY: Two new political parties emerged in Ghana in August, bringing the total number of parties in Ghana to eleven. The United Renaissance Party (URP), led by Kofi Wayo, is an NPP spin-off. The Democratic Freedom Party (DFP), formed by Obed Asamoah, is composed of disaffected former supporters of the main opposition NDC party. At the moment, both parties are small and inconsequential, although the DFP bears watching. End Summary.

The DFP

¶2. (U) The Electoral Commission has announced the certification of two new political parties. The first, known as the Democratic Freedom Party (DFP), succeeded in recruiting "founders" from each of Ghana's 138 districts and has opened offices in at least two-thirds of them. Its chairman is Obed Asamoah, a foreign minister under former President Rawlings, a former university lecturer, and a former Chairman of the main opposition party, the National Democratic Congress (NDC).

¶3. (SBU) In a recent meeting with Poloff and Pol FSN, Asamoah explained that his dissatisfaction with the NDC had been growing for some time. Describing former President Jerry Rawlings as a "dictator" whose divisive rhetoric reflected his lack of tolerance of any dissent within the NDC, Asamoah was further disillusioned by the ugly scenes that took place at the party's national convention in 2005, including intimidation and violence against Rawlings dissenters. At one point, Asamoah said his life had been threatened; he eventually concluded that he had no choice but to leave the NDC and try to launch a viable third party.

¶4. (U) Asamoah said the DFP would be a center-left "social democratic" party, endorsing more state intervention in the economy. He cautioned that this did not mean more state ownership, but rather greater GOG assistance to key industries, such as agriculture and mining, to help them grow along the lines of the South Korean model. In terms of foreign policy, Asamoah would maintain Ghana's tradition of following the lead of the African Union.

¶5. (SBU) Looking ahead to 2008, Asamoah opined that the "shine was off" the ruling New Patriotic Party (NPP); people were tired and would vote for change, he said. He thought there was a good chance that no party would receive a majority of the presidential vote during the first round in 2008, and a strong third party would be appealing. Asamoah has already received expressions of support from many NDC members from the reformist wing of the NDC, especially from the Ashanti and Volta Regions. He hoped to attract more support from disaffected CPP party voters and ultimately from those favoring John Atta Mills as the NDC's standard bearer in 2008. According to Asamoah, Rawlings was actively working against Atta Mills, making it impossible for him to gain the party's nomination for president.

The URP

¶6. (U) The Electoral Commission has also recently certified the

United Renaissance Party (URP), making it the eleventh recognized political party in Ghana. The URP's chair is Kofi Wayo, a gadfly businessman and former NPP candidate for parliament. Opposed to politicians who enter government service merely to amass wealth, the party has launched a populist appeal, saying it would establish "credit schemes" for workers to provide them with economic security and a higher standard of living. In media interviews, Wayo proclaimed that the Ghanaian economy should benefit Ghanaians, not merely satisfy the World Bank and IMF.

Comment

¶7. (SBU) The DFP is attracting some prominent politicians but will need to reach out to voters who supported the NPP in 2004 if it is to become more than a spoiler, splitting the opposition vote in ¶2008. The URP is not taken seriously by most contacts. The reaction to these new parties from the two main political parties has been muted. One NDC insider told Poloff that his party, while panic-stricken at first, did not now consider the DFP to be a serious threat. Nonetheless, the NDC is clearly watching the DFP, which could cut into its support base, especially if it attracts a high profile presidential candidate. Some of our NDC contacts also refute the notion that Rawlings is working against Atta Mills. End Comment.

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